

"Interpreters Series"

FSI-4

FLEMING BROWN



FOLK-LEGACY RECORDS, INC. SHARON, CONNECTICUT



FLEMING BROWN

FLEMING BROWN was born in Marshall, Missouri, in 1926. In 1930, his family moved to Glen Ellyn, Illinois, where he now lives with his wife, Jean, and their little girl Sarah. By profession, Fleming is a commercial artist working in a studio in Chicago, but for some years now, collecting and singing the traditional songs of the Southern Appalachians has been his passion and his avocation. His interest in this music was first aroused in the late 1940's upon hearing some recordings of Uncle Dave Macon and Doc Boggs. Fleming found a five-string banjo in the attic of a local junk-shop and began picking on it, without much success, until he managed to find a teacher. Twice a week, he would arise at 4:30 A.M., pack up his banjo and trek down to the studios of WLS where Doc Hopkins (an old-time singer and banjo player out of Harlan, Kentucky) had a wake-up show from 5:30 to 6:30 A.M. After the program, Fleming and Doc would sit over their coffee and Fleming would get a half-hour banjo lesson. It is no doubt due to this initial training that Fleming's banjo playing has what Jean Ritchie, of Viper, Kentucky, has described as a "down home" sound.

Fleming made his first appearance at the National Folk Festival in 1950, held that year in St. Louis. He has performed at The Ashville, North Carolina, Festival, The Newport Folk Festival, and The Chicago Folk Festival. He teaches banjo classes at Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music. This is his first solo album.

side 1:

REEK AND RAMBLING BLADE
MARKET SQUARE
ELLEN SMITH
ROCKY HILL
FORD MACHINE
THE DEATH OF J. B. MARKHAM
FLAG OF BLUE, WHITE AND RED
THE ELY BRANCH

side 2:

THE CUCKOO
RAILROAD BILL
THE CRUEL WAR IS RAGING
PEARL BRYAN
SUGAR HILL
TEDDY, LET YOUR HAIR HANG DOWN
JOHN HENRY
AS I GO RAMBLIN' ROUND (Guthrie)



FLEMING BROWN



**Recorded by Norm Pellegrini
WFMT, Chicago**

FSI-4



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FOLK-LEGACY RECORDS, INC.

SHARON, CONNECTICUT 06069

FLEMING BROWN



Founded by James P. Fleming
White, Chicago

1914



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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

FLEMING BROWN

Fleming Brown was born in Marshall, Missouri, in 1926. In 1930 his family moved to Glen Ellyn, Illinois, where he now lives with his wife, Jean, and their little girl, Sarah. By profession, Fleming is a commercial artist, but for nearly sixteen years, collecting and singing the traditional songs of the Southern Appalachians has been his passion and his avocation. Like many young interpreters of folksongs, his interest in this music was first aroused upon hearing a recording of Burl Ives. Soon after that, he discovered the recordings of such old-time banjo players as Uncle Dave Macon and Doc Boggs. Fleming located a five-string banjo in the attic of a local junk-shop and began picking on it -- without much success until he managed to find himself a teacher. Twice a week, Fleming would arise at 4:30 in the morning, pack up his banjo, and trek down to the studios of WLS where Doc Hopkins (an old-time singer and banjo player out of Harlan, Kentucky) had a wake-up show from 5:30 to 6:30 a.m. After the program, Fleming and Doc would sit over their coffee and Fleming would get a half-hour banjo lesson. It is no doubt due to this initial training that Fleming's banjo playing has what Jean Ritchie, of Viper, Kentucky, has described as a "down home" sound.

After several years of concentrated practice, Fleming made his first appearance in 1950 at the National Folk Festival, held that year in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1953 he joined the "I COME FOR TO SING" group with Studs Terkel, Larry Lane, Chet Roble and the late Big Bill Broonzy. Also in that year, he and Mike Nichols inaugurated a folk music radio show on Chicago's WFMT which Fleming entitled "THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL" since it began at midnight on Saturdays.

Fleming has performed at the Ashville, North Carolina, Festival, the Newport Folk Festival, and the University of Chicago Folk Festival. He teaches banjo classes at Chicago's OLD TOWN SCHOOL OF FOLK MUSIC. This is his first solo recording.

George D. Armstrong

Side I; Band 1. REEK AND RAMBLING BLADE

This fine American version of what may have been originally an Irish Broadside ballad was recorded for the Archive of American Folksong in 1937 by Justus Begley, of Hazard, Kentucky. In putting the song together for himself, however, Fleming has borrowed freely from the version sung by the late Aunt Molly Jackson.

See: BELDEN, BROWN, COMBS, DAVIS I, FUSON, HENRY, LAWS (L 12), RANDOLPH, etc.

Well, I am a reek and a rambling one;
Eastern shore I've lately come,
Earn my money and to learn my trade
And they call me the reek and the rambling blade.

Well, I come here spending money free,
Went to balls, I went to plays;
At last my money grew very low
And then to the highway I did go.

Well, a pretty little miss, sixteen years old,
Her hair as fine as new spun gold,
Neatest feet, the neatest hands,
I love the ground whereon she stands.

Well, I robbed old Nelson, I do declare,
Robbed him at St. James Square,
Robbed him of five thousand pounds,
Dividing with my comrades 'round.

Well, now I am condemned to die;
Many a lady for me will cry.
Pretty Molly weeps, tears down her hair,
A lady alone left in despair.

My father weeps, he maketh moan;
Mama cries, "My darling son;"
All their weeping, it won't help me
Or save me from that gallows tree.

Papa, give me a ticket to Greenville Town
And it's get on board and I'll sit down;
Wheels will turn and the engine it'll moan,
It'll take me six months to get back home.

Papa, give me some paper and it's I'll sit down,
Drop a few lines to my Governor Brown;
Every word will be the truth
And I'll pray for the Governor to turn me loose.

Well, now I'm dead and laying in my grave;
Final justice sweeps over my head.
All around my grave play tunes of joy
And away go the reek and rambling boy.

Side I; Band 2. MARKET SQUARE

This seems to be a quite well established variant of "The Boston Burglar", which, in turn, has apparently been derived from "Botany Bay", a ballad about a prisoner facing transportation to the Australian penal colony. Fleming learned the version sung here from the singing of Lee Monroe Presnell, 86 year old ballad singer from Beech Mountain, North Carolina, who will soon be heard in Folk-Legacy's coming "Traditional Singers of the South" series.

See: ARNOLD, BROWN, COX, EDDY, GARDNER/CHICKERING,
LAWS (L 16), MORRIS, RANDOLPH, etc.

Oh, when I was a little boy
I worked on Market Square;
No money in my pocket,
I hardly thought it fair.
I went out on the highway,
I learned to rob and steal
And when I made the big haul
How happy did I feel.

Oh, then I wore the black hat,
I rode the buggy fine;
I courted me a pretty little girl,
I knew that she was mine.
I courted her for her beauty,
Her love to me was great,
And when she saw me coming
She'd ringle at the gate.

The other night while sleeping,
Was then I had a dream;
Dreamed I was walking
Out on the golden plain,
Whiskey in my bottle
And money to go my bail;
I woke up broken hearted
A-locked up in the jail.

Well, down came the jailer
About eight o'clock,
Keys in his hands
To sound against the lock,
"Cheer you up, my prisoner,"
I thought I heard him say,
"Down around Nashville
It's six long years to stay."

Oh, down come my true love,
Ten dollar in her hand,
Saying, "My darling boy,
I've done the best I can.
May God bless you
Wherever you may be
And the devil take the jury
For taking you from me."

Side I; Band 3. POOR ELLEN SMITH

BROWN reports two distinct ballads referring to the murder of Ellen Smith by Peter De Graff near Mt. Airy, North Carolina. Frank Proffitt, of Reese, North Carolina, sings what is apparently a third ballad based on the case (Folkways FA2360). De Graff was convicted of the crime in August, 1893, and, after the conviction was upheld by the North Carolina Supreme Court, was executed. RICHARDSON writes that "so great was the feeling, for and against Degraph (sic), that it had to be declared a misdemeanor for the song to be sung in a gathering of any size for the reason that it always fomented a riot." As is so often the

case with ballads of this type, legend has it that while De Graff awaited execution he called for a guitar and composed it himself. Of course, any broadside hawker worth his salt would know that sales could be stimulated by the claim that his ballad was created by the condemned man. Fleming learned his version from his first banjo teacher, Doc Hopkins.

See: BROWN, COMBS, DAVIS I, HENRY, HUDSON, RICHARDSON.

Poor Ellen Smith, Lord,
How was she found?
Shot through the heart,
Lying cold on the ground.
The bullet did fly,
Oh, the blood it did run;
Shot through the heart
With a .44 gun.

Well, I saw her on Monday,
For that's the day
They came and they hauled
Her sweet body away.
Who had the heart, Lord,
Who had the skill,
To shoot down my sweetheart
For a ten dollar bill?

Well, I laid out six months,
Afraid of the time
They might find the one
Who committed the crime.
Want to go back
And my character save,
And I'll plant some more flowers
Around sweet Ellen's grave.

Now I'm in jail,
Oh, God knows it's hard,
And my sweetheart lays down
In a lonesome graveyard.
Now I'm in jail,
Oh, a prisoner am I,
But God he is with me,
He hears every vow.

Well, I didn't love poor Ellen
To make her my wife,
But I loved her too dearly
To take her sweet life.
The jury will hang me,
That is, if they can,
But God knows I'll die
As an innocent man.

Oh, the jury will hang me,
That is, if they can,
But God knows I'll die
As an innocent man.

Side I; Band 4. ROCKY HILL

This lovely folk lyric, combining several "floating" verses, was taught to Fleming by Woody Wachtel, who learned it, in turn, from Rufus Crisp. I understand that it was originally sung as "Grassy Hill" and that Fleming is responsible for the change. The banjo tuning used here is G-DGAD.

Rocky Hill, Rocky Hill,
Hill so high and rocky;
I'm going to Rocky Hill
And there I'll see my Nancy.
Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh,
And there I'll see my Nancy.

How old are you, my pretty little miss?
How old are you, my daisy?
She answered me with a tee-hee-hee
And it damned near drove me crazy.
Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh,
Damned near drove me crazy.

Marry me, oh marry me,
Marry me, my honey;
Give to you all my land
And give you all my money.
Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh,
Give to you my money.

Put my musket in my hand,
Knapsack on my shoulder;
I'm a-going to Mexico
And there I'll be a soldier.
Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh,
And there I'll be a soldier.

Rocky Hill, oh, Rocky Hill,
Hill so high and rocky,
I'm going to Rocky Hill
And there to see my Nancy.
Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh,
And there to see my Nancy.

Side I; Band 5. FORD MACHINE

Fleming believes this to be a fragment of a song recorded commercially in the 1920's. He learned it from Betty Wills of Oklahoma.

Well, I bought me a little Ford machine
And I filled it full of gas-i-line,
I cranked it up, but the damn thing got away;

Well, it got going 'fore I got in
And now I own a pile of tin,
But every month I step right up and pay.

Up and pay, up and pay,
Every month on a very certain day,

It got going 'fore I got in
And now I own a pile of tin,
But every month I step right up and pay.

Side I; Band 6. J. B. MARKHAM (MARCUM)

Another song which Fleming learned from Doc Hopkins, this tale of murder and bribery refers to the feud between the Hargis and Marcum families in Breathitt County, Kentucky, in 1903. Olive Woolley Burt describes the events as follows:

J. B. Marcum killed a man named Hargis and escaped to Texas. After some time, he returned to Breathitt County, and war was declared on him by friends of the murdered man. The governor sent troops to quell the trouble, but the feuders paid no attention to them.

One day Marcum was in town attending to some business. He was just leaving the courthouse when Curtis Jett, who had been hired by the Hargis faction for the job, shot Marcum down. Thomas White helped Jett make his getaway. The two were followed and arrested and brought to trial. The chief witness against them was B. J. Ewen, who had seen the shooting from across the street.

Jett and White were taken to Cynthiana for trial. There it came out that Edward Thorp and Joseph Crawford, teamsters for the Hargis party, had set fire to Marcum's property; and one Gardner Plummer had offered Ewen a bribe of five thousand dollars to leave town so he could not testify at the trial. Grand Jury indictments were brought against the trio for arson and bribery. Jett and White were convicted and sentenced to prison, but after some years both were pardoned.

The tune is, of course, the one generally associated with the ballad of "Jesse James".

See: BURT and COMBS, and FUSON.

It was in the month of May,
Half past eight o'clock one day,
J. B. Marcum was a-standing in the door

Of a courthouse in his town,
Where Curt Jett was hanging 'round
Just to get a chance to lay him on the floor.

Judge Jim Harkis and his man,
Sheriff Edward Callahan,
Were across the street in Harker Brothers' store;
Some believe they knew the plot,
Hence were listening for the shot
And to see Jett's victim fall there in the door.

Oh, Marcum leaves a wife
To mourn all her life,
Two little children to be brave;
It was little Curtis Jett,
Thomas White and others yet,
Were the men who laid poor Marcum in his grave.

Thomas White, a friend of Jett's,
No worse man was ever met,
He came walking boldly through the courthouse hall;
And as he was passing by
He looked Marcum in the eye,
Knowing truly that poor Marcum soon would fall.

P. J. Hewing, wise and true,
Knowing well it would not do
To expose the men who held the weapons there,
So he kept the secret well,
He was afraid to tell;
He knew that Jett would kill him then and there.

White he walked out on the street,
Stopped to see it all complete,
Expecting soon to hear the fatal shot;
Jett advanced across the hall
And with pistol, lead and ball,
He killed poor J. B. Marcum on the spot.

Chorus

They arrested White and Jett
When the courts in Jackson met;
The prosecution labored with its might.
Then, when Breathitt's court was o'er,
Judge Redwine could do no more,
So he left it for another court to right.

Now the jury disagreed,
Just one man began to plead,
He thought Curt Jett and White should both go free;
And he vowed until the last
His vote he would not cast.
Some believe Judge Harkis paid the man a fee.

Then they tried these men once more,
Not in Jackson as before,
They could not get their justice in that town;
Then the courts in Hazard met,
They condemned both White and Jett
And the verdict of their guilt in it was found.

Chorus

Now the final trial is past,
White and Jett are doomed at last
To the prisonhouse where they will have to stay;
And with men of other crimes
Have to labor all the time
Till death shall come and take them both away.

Now their mothers grieve today
For their boys so far away;
There's nothing that can sever a mother's love.
She will pray for them each breath,
Will cling to them till death,
And she longs to meet them in the courts above.

Chorus

Side I; Band 7. FLAG OF BLUE, WHITE AND RED

The mountain farmer-turned-coal-miner produced a number of stirring songs about his struggle for decent working conditions and a living wage, but the anti-union song is extremely rare. Fleming learned this one from a woman in Missouri who told him it was written by her son. She insisted that her name be kept secret, as she was "afraid of reprisals". I have not seen the song reported elsewhere.

Come and listen to my song,
Story of a nation wrong;
Idle men and a roving band
Strike the tools from a miner's hand.

Flag of blue, white and red,
A Man's got a right to earn his bread;
Flag of blue, white and red,
A man's got a right to earn his bread.

Children lying in the bed,
Crying, "Daddy, please bring home some bread."
Picket line says, "You can't go through;
We'll beat you up if you try to."

Chorus

John L.'s pay is big and fat;
I wish I had a tenth of that.
I don't like to sit at home
And hear my wife and young'uns moan.

Chorus

Thought I'd work 'cause I'm almost broke,
Dig for Donegan Coal and Coke;
Three hundred pickets came around,
Beat me bloody to the ground.

Chorus

I tell you, boys, it is a crime
That has transpired in many a mine;
You do the work the best you can,
You get beat up by idle men.

Chorus

Side I; Band 8. FARE THEE WELL, OLD ELY BRANCH

This is one of the many wonderful songs composed by the late Aunt Molly Jackson, eloquent spokesman for the miners during their bitter struggle with the coal operators in "Bloody Harlan" County, Kentucky. For further information on the song and the story of Aunt Molly, herself, see John Greenway's American Folksongs of Protest, A. S. Barnes and Company, Inc., New York, Perpetua Edition, 1960, and the Kentucky Folklore Record, Vol. VII, No. 4 (Aunt Molly Jackson Memorial Issue).

Oh, fare thee well, old Ely Branch,
Fare thee well, I say,
I'm tired of living on your dried beans, your tomatoes,
And I'm a-going away.

We had a strike at Ely this Spring
And old Hughes he did say,
"Come on, boys, go back to work
And I'll give you two weeks' pay."

Well, we put on our mining clothes,
Hard work again we tried,
And when old payday rolled around
We found old Hughes had lied.

Oh, fare thee well, etc.

Take your children out of Ely Branch
Before they cry for bread,
For when old Hughes's debts are paid
He won't be worth a thread.

Old Hughes says he owns more mines than these,
He's got money for to lend,
But when old payday rolls around
He can't pay off his men.

Oh, fare thee well, etc.

I'd rather be in Pineyville jail,
With my back all covered with lice,
Than to be in Hughes's coal mines
Digging coal at Hughes's price.

Oh, fare thee well, old Ely Branch,
Fare thee well, I say,
I'm tired of living on your dried beans, your tomatoes,
And I'm a-going away.

Side II; Band 1. THE COO-COO

Fleming learned this first from a recording of
Clarence Ashley (Columbia 15489D) and later added more
verses from another early recording (Kelly Harrell --
Victor 40047). The song has been widely reported from
tradition in this country and in the British Isles.

See: BELDEN, BROWN, RANDOLPH, RITCHIE, SHARP, etc.

Oh the cuckoo, she's a pretty bird,
She sings as she flies;
She never sings cuckoo
Till the fourth of July.

Never kill a pretty cuckoo,
She will do you no harm,
And she'll eat up all the grub worms
That destroys a man's farm.

Oh, the cuckoo, she's a clever bird,
Builds her nest in the pines;
Way high in the timber
Where the blacksnakes don't climb.

Oh, the cuckoo, she's a pretty bird,
Don't I wish she were mine;
She never drinks water,
She always drinks wine.

Come all you young ladies,
Take a warning from me;
Never place your affection
On a green growing tree.

Oh, the leaves they will wither
And the roots will decay;
I'm a-going for to leave you,
A long time to stay.

Side II; Band 2. RAILROAD BILL

Fleming says that he has heard so many singers,
traditional and non-traditional, sing this song that it
would be impossible to say from whom he first learned it.
It is generally believed to be of Negro origin, although

many white singers in the south know it. Bill ranks with Stackolee as a sort of folk hero to the Negro who saw in their defiance of the white man's law and in their down-right meanness an opportunity to sing a thinly disguised protest against oppression.

See: BOTKIN, BURT, LOMAX, etc.

Railroad Bill, he's mean and he's bad,
Whipped his mama, shot a round at his dad,
And it's ride, ride, ride, ride, ride.

Get me a gun long as my arm,
Shoot anybody ever done me harm,
And it's ride, ride, ride, ride, ride.

Going to the mountains, way out west,
.38 Special sticking out of my vest,
And it's ride, ride, ride, ride, ride.

Got a .38 Special on a .45 frame,
How can I miss him when I've got dead aim?
And it's ride, ride, ride, ride, ride.

Railroad Bill standing on a hill,
He never worked and he never will,
And it's ride, ride, ride, ride, ride.

Railroad Bill, Lord, he shoots so fine,
Shot three holes through a close friend of mine,
And it's ride, ride, ride, ride, ride.

Railroad Bill, he's mean and he's bad,
Whipped his mama, shot a round at his dad,
And it's ride, ride, ride, ride, ride.

Side II; Band 3. THE CRUEL WAR IS RAGING

The story of the girl who wishes to dress herself in men's clothing and follow her lover off to war is widely known in British and American folksong (see LAWS, N -- "BALLADS OF LOVERS' DISGUISES AND TRICKS"). This lovely song was learned from the singing of Pete Steele (Folkways FS3828) who learned it from Andy Whitaker.

See: BROWN, BELDEN, FUSON, and LAWS (O 33).

Well, the cruel war is raging,
Oh, Johnny's gone to fight
And I want to be with him
From morning till night.

That's what grieves my heart so;
"Can't I go with you, Johnny?"
"Oh, no, my love, no."

Well, I'll roach back my hair,

Men's clothing I'll put on,
And I'll walk as your servant
As we march along.

Chorus

Your waist it is too slender,
Your fingers keen and small,
Your waist it is too slender
For to face a cannon ball.

Well, I know my waist is slender,
My fingers keen and small;
It'll not change my countenance
To see ten thousand fall.

Chorus

Well, my pack is on my back
And my musket's on my hand;
I'm going down to Mexico
To fight in a foreign land.

Chorus

One hand upon his shoulder,
The other on his breast;
"Can't I go with you, Johnny?"
"Oh, yes, my love, yes."

Side II; Band 4. PEARL BRYAN

This grisly tale describes the murder of a nineteen year old girl by two dental students in 1896. Pearl was apparently pregnant and was killed by an overdose of cocaine while the two students attempted to perform an abortion at the request of the man responsible for her condition, a minister's son named William Wood. The decapitation was a rather clumsy attempt to prevent the identification of the body. Fleming learned the song from Doc Hopkins.

See: BROWN ("U" text of "The Jealous Lover"), BURT, COMBS.

"Twas on a winter's evening
This awful crime was done;
Scott Jackson and Lon Walling,
Pearl Bryan's heart had won.

It was in the month of January,
The people for miles around said,
They found that poor girl's body,
They could not find her head.

The news carried to Greencastle
Where her poor parents did dwell;
They identified her clothing,
But the truth they ne'er would tell.

Then came Pearl Bryan's sister,
Crawling on her knees,
Pleading with Scott Jackson,
"My sister's head, oh, please."

Scott Jackson stood there stubborn,
Not a word he murmured or said,
But when you get to heaven
There'll be no missing head.

So all you ladies take warning
Before it is too late
Of the worst crime ever committed
In our fair Kentucky state.

Side II; Band 5. SUGAR HILL

I have been unable to verify Fleming's source for this song, but he believes he learned it from a recording of Doc Walsh. Like many banjo songs, it borrows freely and adapts verses from similar songs, making specific identification practically impossible.

You want to get your eye knocked out,
You want to get your fill,
You want to get your eye knocked out,
Go to Sugar Hill.
Hoo, toot, toot, etc.

Get a lonesome farmer, gal,
I want a drink of rye;
I'm a-going to Sugar Hill
Or know the reason why.

Possum on the rail fence
Looking at the sun;
Hound dog coming down the road,
Possum better run.

Possum up the 'simmon tree,
Raccoon on the ground;
Possum up the 'simmon tree
Shaking 'simmons down.

Fourteen miles of mountain road,
Fifteen miles of sand;
If ever I travel this road again
I'll be a married man.

Get the banjo off the wall,
Grab your fiddle, Bill;
Hitch the horses to the sleigh,
We're going to Sugar Hill.

Well, I don't want no drover gal
Drives a four horse team;
All I want's a pretty little girl
Turns her wheels by steam.

Side II; Band 6. TEDDY, LET YOUR HAIR HANG DOWN

Fleming learned this fine song from the singing of North Carolina's great ballad singer, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, who calls it "Mole in the Ground". (Folkways FA2040) Fleming has changed the name of the girl, perhaps unconsciously, from "Kempie" to "Teddy". If Fleming owes his banjo style to his first teacher, Doc Hopkins, certainly his singing style has been at least strongly influenced by Mr. Lunsford.

Well, I wish I was a mole in the ground,
Well, I wish I was a mole in the ground,
If I was a mole in the ground,
I'd root that mountain down,
And I wish I was a mole in the ground.

Oh, Baby, where you been so long?
Oh, Baby, where you been so long?
I've been in the pen
With the rough and rowdy men,
And it's, Baby, where you been so long?

Well, Teddy wants a nine dollar shawl,
Well, Teddy wants a nine dollar shawl.
I come o'er the hill
With a twenty dollar bill
And it's, Baby, where you been so long?

Well, Teddy, let your hair hang down,
Well, Teddy, let your hair hang down,
Let your hair hang down,
Let your bangs curl around,
And it's, Teddy, let your hair hang down.

Well, I don't like no railroad man,
Well, I don't like no railroad man;
A railroad man,
He'll kill you when he can,
Then he'll drink up your blood like wine.

Oh, I wish I was a mole in the ground,
Oh, I wish I was a mole in the ground;
Mole in the ground,
I'd root that mountain down,
And I wish I was a mole in the ground.

Side II; Band 7. JOHN HENRY

Much has been written about the real and the legendary folk hero, John Henry, who pitted his great human strength against the newly-invented steam drill in the Big Bend Tunnel of the C. & O. Railroad in the West Virginia mountains back in the early 1870's, and won. Just how much of the ballad refers to John Henry's steel-driving ability and how much to his sexual prowess is a matter for debate, but, regardless of (or, perhaps, because of) the phallic symbolism, it remains one of the most moving ballads in our tradition. When I asked Fleming from whom he had learned it, he replied, simply, "From everybody."

See: BROWN, CHAPPELL, COX, JOHNSON, LOMAX III, WHITE.

John Henry was a little baby,
Lord, sitting on his daddy's knee;
Picked up a hammer and a little bit of steel,
Said, "Hammer'll be the death of me, great God,
This hammer'll be the death of me."

The captain he said to John Henry,
"I'm going to bring me a steam drill around;
I'm going to bring me a steam drill out on the job
And I'll whop that steel on down, down, down,
Whop that steel on down."

John Henry said to his captain,
"Well, a man ain't nothing but a man;
Before I'll let that steam drill beat me down
I'll die with my hammer in my hand, great God,
I'll die with that hammer in my hand."

Sunshine hot and burning,
There weren't no breeze at all;
Sweat rolled down like water on a hill
The day John Henry let his hammer fall, great God,
The day John Henry let his hammer fall.

John Henry said to his shaker,
"Well, shaker, why don't you sing?
I'm throwing twelve pounds from my hips on down;
Hear that cold steel ring, great God,
You can hear that cold steel ring.
Hear that cold steel ring, ring, ring,
You can hear that cold steel ring."

John Henry said to his shaker,
"Well, shaker, why don't you pray?
If I miss that little bit of steel,
Tomorrow'll be your burying day, great God,
Tomorrow'll be your burying day."

The man that invented the steam drill
Thought he was feeling fine;
John Henry drove about fourteen feet
And that steam drill only made nine, great God,
Steam drill only made nine.

John Henry hammered in the mountains,
His hammer was striking fire;
He hammered so hard that he broke his old heart
And he laid down that hammer and he died, great God,
He laid down that hammer and he died.
He laid down his hammer and he died, great God,
He laid down his hammer and he died.

Well, they took John Henry by the railroad
And they buried him down in the sand;
Every locomotive comes roaring 'round the bend
Says, "There lies a steel driving man, great God,
There lies a steel driving man."

Some say he's from Texas
And some say he's from Maine;
I say he's nothing but a Tennessee man,
The leader of a steel driving gang, great God,
The leader of a steel driving gang.

John Henry had a little woman
And the dress that she wore was red;
She went down the track, never did look back,
Saying, "My poor Johnny is dead, great God,"
Saying, "My poor John lies dead."

Side II; Band 8. AS I GO RAMBLING 'ROUND

Another fine song from the pen of America's great
folk poet and composer, Woody Guthrie. Anyone wishing
to know more about Woody, his life and his way of making
a song, should read his superb autobiography, Bound for
Glory, which has recently been re-issued in paperback by
Dolphin.

I've rambled around your cities,
I've rambled around your towns;
I never see a friend I know
As I go rambling 'round, boys,
As I go rambling 'round.

The peach trees they are loaded,
The limbs are hanging down;
I pick 'em all day for a dollar, boys,
As I go rambling 'round,
I go rambling 'round.

My sweetheart and my parents,
Well, I left in my old home town;
I am just a refugee
As I go rambling 'round, boys,
As I go rambling 'round.

My parents hoped that I would be
A man of some renown,
But I am just a refugee
As I go rambling 'round,
As I go rambling 'round.

I've rambled around your cities,
I've rambled around your towns;
I never see a friend I know
As I go rambling 'round, boys,
As I go rambling 'round.

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